HINTS ON MOUNTING LEPIDOPTERA.

By William C. Wood, New York.

The editor has suggested that I jot down some points in connection with the spreading of Butterflies. I am no authority on this subject, but there are a few things which my experience has shown to be useful to me, and this short paper may, as someone has expressed it, be of a certain interest as showing "how the other fellow does it."

Freshly killed specimens are usually easier to handle than "papered" material. Small specimens which have died with the wings reversed are sometimes obstinate objects. I have made a wooden stand, illustrated below (Fig. 1), which often simplifies the problem. A No. 1½ or No. 2 pin is thrust through the thorax, between the legs, and the specimen placed upon one end of the central "fin" of the stand, with the pin lightly piercing the wood to hold it in place. Then the points of a pair of thin flat straight forceps are inserted, slightly separated, between wings and body, with the pin between them. Next the forceps are allowed to separate gradually, the while they are gently pressed downwards. This first spreads the wings and then closes them together in their natural position. Next, the pin is withdrawn, the body of the specimen taken between thumb and finger of the left hand while the forceps are withdrawn. The specimen is now in the usual position for pinning. A slight squeeze, to fix the wings in the normal position, is desirable.

I use heavy paper to hold the wings on the setting board, a single slip for each wing. When the specimen is a large one (50 mm. or more in expanse) I use another device preliminary to placing the paper strips. This is shown in Fig. 2. It is made from a brass hairpin cast into a leaden weight as shown. After pinning the specimen in the groove of the setting board I gently separate the wings, if approximated as usual, with the flat forceps, and lay upon them the wire prongs of the little device. This holds them flat upon the board, but as the tips of the prongs are bent downward a trifle, the wings can be moved without rubbing. I then adjust and fasten all four wings with setting needles. Finally the paper slips, one to each side, are slid under the prongs if these are in the way, and secured by glass headed steel pins (which can be had at any notion counter), the little device is

lifted off and the operation is over except for the adjustment of the antennae. (Figure 3.)

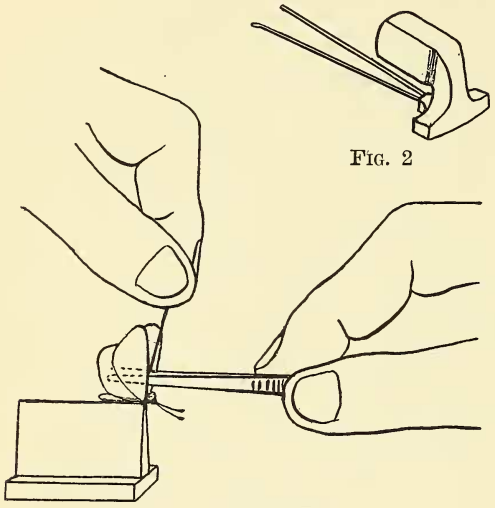

Fig. 2

Fig. 1

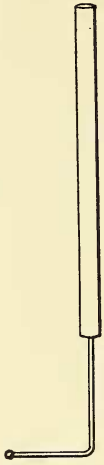

Fig. 4

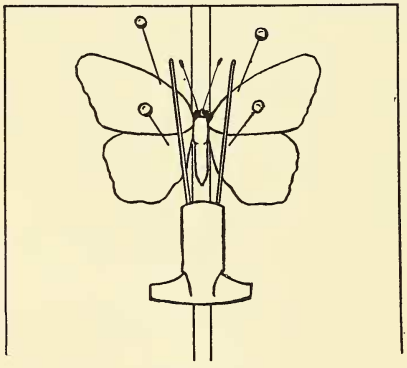

Fig. 3

For small specimens I use, to adjust the wings, the little tool devised by Dr. Henry Skinner (Fig. 4), than which I know of nothing better. It is simply a regular insect pin (about No. 3) bent at a right angle one-half inch from the head, and the point inserted in a wooden handle, preferably a trifle thicker than those of setting needles. When the insect is pinned in the groove of

the setting board this little tool, held in the left hand, is inserted between the upright wings, and those of one side gently pressed out until flat upon the board. Held flat by the angled end of the tool they are adjusted by setting needles, which usually hold them flat in place until the same operation has been done on the other side, when paper strips are applied and pinned.

Hesperids, especially if papered material, are sometimes so obstinate that the hind wings cannot be drawn forward without tearing them. With such I cut the muscle of the hind wing with a very small sharp scalpel (what is known as a cataract knife is good). Holding the specimen between thumb and finger of the left hand I pass this knife, held in the same plane as the wings, between abdomen and secondary, pushing it gently forward until it brings up at the attachment of the wing. Then firmly but carefully, with a controlled movement, sever the tendon. A little practice teaches one to feel when he has cut just far enough and not so far as to amputate the wing. Treated thus Hesperids are spread as easily as Pierids.

Specimens which have been papered are almost sure to dry out loose on the pin. On removing them from the setting board I push them up the pin a short distance, applying the forceps beside the pin under the thorax, and touch to the pin a drop of shellac, just under the thorax. Then push the specimen down to its proper level. This permanently prevents swinging on the pin.

The wings of the smaller Noctuid moths have a habit of drooping or rising a few months after mounting. I have been told that this may be prevented by the application of a touch of shellac at the juncture of the wings and the thorax on the under side, when the specimens are lifted from the setting board. I have not tried this long enough, as yet, to be sure of its efficacy.

Hylephila phylaeus Drury.—This Hesperid butterfly, so abundant in the South, occurred in much greater numbers than usual at Flushing, New York, during the latter part of July and throughout August and September, 1925. A single female was seen by the writer at White Plains, New York, on August 16, 1925.—E. L. Bell, Flushing, N. Y.